

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2722

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEHRAN 4194

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, IN, IR

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY
OFFICIAL N. P. ALEXANDER

REF: A. NEW DELHI 689 (NOTAL) B. TEHRAN 3689 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: VISITING INDIAN EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTRY OFFICIAL ALEXANDER AND DCM MET RECENTLY FOR DISCUSSION WHICH FOCUSED ON MUTUAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ADVERSELY AFFECTING RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND INDIA. ALEXANDER SEEMED TO UNDERSTAND BASES OF IRANIAN APPREHENSIONS IN WHICH INDIA FIGURES BUT HE DID NOT CONCEDE THAT FACTUAL FOUNDATION EXISTS FOR MOST OF THEM. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, ALEXANDER STRESSED DILEMMA INDIA FACES IN DISPELLING IRANIAN CONCERNS. END SUMMARY.

1. CHIEF OF WEST ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN DIVISION OF INDIAN MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS N. P. ALEXANDER VISITED TEHRAN LATE MAY AFTER ACCOMPANYING INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER SWARAN SINGH ON VISITS TO DAMASCUS AND BAGHDAD. IN TEHRAN HE MET WITH MFA OFFICIALS AND RESIDENT DIPLOMATS. HE WELCOMED DCM'S SUGGESTION THAT THEIR TALK CENTER ON " PERCEPTIONS" THAT INDIA AND IRAN HAVE ABOUT EACH OTHER.

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2. DCM SAW PRIMARY FOCUS OF INDIAN CONCERN IN THIS CONTEXT AS PAKISTAN AND PERSIAN GULF. WHATEVER VALIDITY OF IRANIAN SUSPICIONS ABOUT INDIAN MOTIVES IN PAKISTAN, ALEXANDER SHOULD REALIZE THEY WERE FACT OF LIFE. THESE PERCEPTIONS OF SCOPE OF INDIAN INVOLVEMENT

IN PAKISTAN ENCOMPASSED NOT ONLY BALUCHISTAN BUT PAKISTAN'S NORTHWEST FRONTIER AREA AS WELL. INDIA'S TREATY RELATIONSHIP WITH SOVIET UNION ONLY ADDED TO IRAN'S CONCERNS ABOUT INDIAN AMBITIONS IN THE SUBCONTINENT AND PARTICULARLY IN PAKISTAN.

3. DCM DID NOT CONSIDER IRANIAN SUSPICIONS ABOUT INDIA TO BE A FUNCTION OF DIRECT INDIAN- IRANIAN RELATIONS. NO FUNDAMENTAL BIAS AGAINST INDIA EXISTED. RATHER, IRAN SAW ITS OWN SECURITY AS DEEPLY INVOLVED WITH THE FATE OF PAKISTAN AND VIEWED THREATS TO PAKISTAN AS THREATS TO ITSELF.

4. UNFORTUNATELY FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, PAKISTAN WAS NOT ONLY AREA OF IRANIAN CONCERN ABOUT INDIAN INTENTIONS. PERSIAN GULF WAS AT LEAST AS IMPORTANT AND PROPER UNDERSTANDING OF INTENSITY OF IRAN'S REOCCUPATION WITH SECURITY IN GULF AREA MIGHT HAVE BENEFICIAL EFFECT ON OVERALL IRANIAN- INDIAN RELATIONS. GULF IS CENTRAL TO IRANIAN CALCULATIONS

BECAUSE IRAN'S AMBITIOUS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND MILITARY BUILDUP ARE FINANCED MAINLY BY ITS OIL EXPORTS. ARAB STATES WITH LARGER INCOMES AND RELATIVELY SMALLER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS MIGHT BE SERIOUSLY INCONVENIENCED IF SOMETHING HAPPENED TO DISRUPT FREE FLOW OF OIL FROM GULF, BUT FOR IRAN ANY STOPPAGE COULD POSE MAJOR PROBLEMS THREATENING IRAN'S AMBITIONS TO BUILD PROSPEROUS, MODERN STATE.

5. IRAN SAW RADICAL BAGHDAD REGIME AND ITS MACHINATIONS IN GULF AS POTENTIAL THREAT TO GULF STABILITY AND THUS TO IRAN'S SECURITY. PROBLEM WAS COMPOUNDED BECAUSE THIS REGIME ALSO ENJOYED TREATY RELATIONSHIP WITH SOVIET UNION JUST AS INDIA DID WITH USSR. MORE MODERATE SOUNDS RECENTLY OUT OF MOSCOW AND SOVIET DRIVE FOR DETENTE WITH WEST WERE REGARDED IN TEHRAN AS TACTICAL IN NATURE AND NOT REDUCING ULTIMATE SOVIET THREAT IN AEA. INTO THIS PATTERN OF IRANIAN UNEASE INDIA, IN PERCEPTION OF TEHRAN, CONFIDENTIAL

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FITTED QUITE HARMONIOUSLY. VISITS OF HIGH INDIAN AND IRAQI OFFICIALS WERE BEING EXCHANGED WHILE AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN BAGHDAD AND NEW DELHI WERE EXPANDING AND BAGHDAD GOVERNMENT COULD NOT BUT BE STRENGTHENED THEREBY3

6. DCM CONTINUED THAT IRAN'S CONCERNS ABOUT INDIA WERE NO DOUBT SOMETIMES OVERDRAWN, BUT THIS MADE THEM NO LESS AN OBSTACLE TO IMPROVED RELATIONS. BETTER BILATERAL RELATIONS WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO STABILITY IN AREA. INDIA WAS RECOGNIZED AS LEADING POWER IN SOUTH ASIA WHILE IRAN WAS DOMINANT COUNTRY IN THIS IMMEDIATE AREA. AS SUCH THE TWO COUNTRIES NEEDED TO TALK MORE FREQUENTLY AND DIRECTLY TO EACH OTHER. DCM SOMETIMES HAD IMPRESSION-- AND THIS WAS A PERCEPTION WHICH INDIA SHOULD REEXAMINE-- THAT INDIA STILL REGARDED IRAN AS HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON AMERICA AND THUS STILL UNDER THE THUMB OF UNITED STATES. THIS WAS ALTOGETHER WRONG. IRAN SEVERAL YEARS AGO HAD GRADUATED FROM AID- RECIPIENT

CATEGORY AND WAS NOW VERY MUCH ON ITS OWN, MAKING ITS OWN DECISIONS AND BUYING WHAT IT WANTED FROM WHATEVER SOURCE IT CHOSE. THUS, TALKING TO UNITED STATES ABOUT INDIA'S PROBLEMS WITH IRAN WAS NOT THE WAY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS. THIS BETTER ACHIEVED BY DIRECOCONTACT.

7. ALEXANDER SAID HE APPRECIATED THIS EXPOSITION. HE KNEW FROM HIS OWN EXPERIENCE HOW SUSPICIOUS IRAN WAS OF INDIA AND HOW IMPORTANT IT WAS TO TRY TO DISPEL THESE SUSPICIONS. BUT WHAT COULD INDIA DO? NO A SINGLE ALLEGATION OF INDIAN SCHEMES OR MACHINATIONS IN PAKISTAN HAD EVER BEEN FOUND TO HAVE ANY FACTUAL BASIS. HE WAS NO SPEAKING FOR SOVIET UNION, WHICH HE REALIZED WAS LINKED IN IRAN'S EYES WITH ALLEGED INDIAN SCHEMES AFFECTING PAKISTAN; SOVIETS COULD SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES. BUT INDIA'S HANDS WERE CLEAN, AS ALEXANDER HAD PERSONALLY SOUGHT TO REASSURE IRANIAN OFFICIALS. YET IRAN REMAINED UNCONVINCED ABOUT INDIA'S PURPOSES IN PAKISTAN. HOW COULD INDIA REASSURE IRAN WHEN NO BASIS IN FACT EXISTED FOR IRAN'S FEARS? INDIA APPRECIATED IRAN'S INTEREST IN PAKISTAN. IF IRAN WANTED TO HELP PAKISTAN, INDIA DID NOT OBJECT; THAT WAS IRAN'S OWN BUSINESS. (COMMENT: ALEXANDER DID NOT INDICATE IF HE WAS REFERRING TO POSSIBLE IRANIAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO PAKISTAN, WHICH NEW DELHI OBVIOUSLY WOULD OBJECT TO.)

8. ALEXANDER PORTRAYED INDIA'S POLICY TOWARDS IRAQ AS HAVING NO CONFIDENTIAL

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ANTI- IRANIAN OVERTONES. RATHER INDIA HAD STAKE IN IRAQI OIL AND IN ECONOMIC COOPERATION WITH BAGHDAD. AGAIN HE WAS NOT ADDRESSING HIMSELF TO SOVIET AMBITIONS, OR ABSENCE THEREOF, IN IRAQ. USSR COULD SPEAK FOR ITSELF. BUT INDIA'S GOALS IN IRAQ WERE QUITE LEGITIMATE AND CONSTITUTED NO THREAT TO IRAN.

9. CONVERSATION CONCLUDED WITH ALEXANDER AGREEING WITH DCM'S OBSERVATION THAT ANY BREAKUP OF PAKISTAN WOULD BE LIKELY TO INVOLVE FAR GREATER DANGER TO PEACE THAN HAD BEEN OCCASIONED BY SEPARATION OF EAST AND WEST PAKISTAN. HE SIMILARLY AGREED THAT RIVAL AXES SUCH AS ONE OCCASIONALLY MENTIONED LATELY INVOLVING NEW DELHI, BAGHDAD AND MOSCOW ON THE ONE HAND AND TEHRAN, ISLAMABAD AND PEKING ON THE OTHER WOULD BE KEHELPFUL TO AREA SECURITY. INDIA DID NOT THINK IN SUCH TERMS AND WOULD NOT BE A PARTNER IN ANY SUCH SCHEME.

10. COMMENT: WE TRIED, HOPEFULLY WITH SOME SUCCESS, TO HAMMER AWAY AT ELEMENTARY CONCEPT THAT INDIA AND IRAN SHOULD TALK TO EACH OTHER MORE FREQUENTLY. WE SHALL, OF COURSE, ON ALL APPROPRIATE OCCASIONS URGED SAME POINT ON OUR IRANIAN FRIENDS. ADDITIONAL COMMENT:

ALEXANDER DID NOT RAISE SUBJECT OF IRANIAN MILITARY BUILDUP OR QUESTION OF TRANSFER OF IRANIAN ARMS TO PAKISTAN.
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